



A RESOURCE GUIDE FOR FAMILIES

Talking About Suicide



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Disclaimer

All content provided by Bark was created for informational purposes only and is not intended to be a substitute for professional medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment. Always consult your child’s physician or another qualified healthcare provider with any questions you may have regarding a potential medical condition. Never disregard professional medical advice or delay seeking it because of any content provided here. Bark is not responsible for the claims or advice of linked external websites.

**If you believe your child or another person
may be in immediate danger, call 911.**

How to Use This Guide

Talking to your kids about suicide isn't easy, but it's a very important topic for families to cover. Suicide is the second-leading cause of death for ages 10–24, which means there's a high likelihood that you or your child knows someone who is struggling. This guide provides not only information about suicide, but also warning signs, conversation starters for kids of all ages, and even ways for your kids to support their friends.

About Bark

Bark helps families manage and protect their children's digital lives. Our award-winning service monitors 30+ of the most popular apps and social media platforms for signs of digital dangers. Our web filtering and screen time management tools empower families to set healthy limits around the websites and apps their kids can access and when they can visit them.



Age-Appropriate Ways to Talk About Suicide With Your Kids

Whether your child is in elementary school or about to graduate high school, it's important for you to be able to explain suicide in a way that makes sense and isn't too scary.

If a young child asks about suicide:

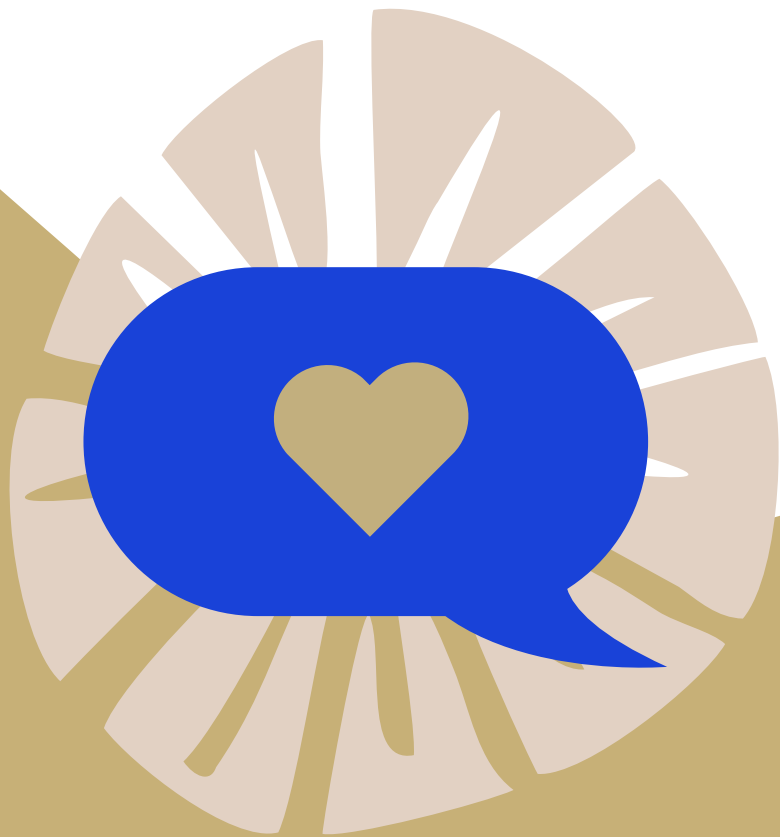
- The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends parents do not talk about tragedies until kids are 8 if they're not directly affected by it.
- Keep it simple, without going into intense or graphic detail.
- Say things like, "This person died and it's really sad. They had a bad disease."
- Give short, true answers.

Tweens may begin understanding the concept of suicide, so be sure to listen them.

- Be direct. Start the conversation with questions like, "What have you heard about suicide? What do you think about it?"
- Talking about death can be frightening, so be extra patient.
- Explain mental illness as you would a physical illness, without blame or judgment.
- Say "died by suicide" instead of "committed suicide." The verb "commit" can imply a moral failing.

Teens are more familiar with suicide than kids and tweens.

- Don't overreact – that may shut down any future communication on the subject. Underreacting, on the other hand, may be dangerous. Trust your instincts.
- Make sure the conversation is two-sided and not a lecture.
- Kids can struggle with how to support their friends who are depressed. Let them know they can always tell an adult if they think the friend is in danger.
- Reiterate that there's no shame in getting help – for anyone.



11 Ways Teens Can Help Someone Who's Depressed or Suicidal

There's a chance your child may one day have to help support a friend or classmate who is struggling with depression or suicidal ideation. Here's how they can help.

1. Tell someone

Trust your gut – if you have a feeling that something's not right with your friend, or you think they might need help, tell a parent, guidance counselor, or teacher you're worried about them.

2. Ask if they're serious

Ask your friend, "How serious are you about suicide?" If you sense that they might try to hurt themselves, call a crisis center, call 911, or tell an adult right away.

3. Tell them they're not alone

When people are depressed, they can feel extremely lonely. Make sure to reach out to them and tell them you're there for them and available to talk.

4. Take them seriously

People may talk about killing themselves jokingly, but suicide is no laughing matter. If someone talks about it, check in with them, even if you think they might be joking.

5. Provide resources

Encourage them to reach out to their parents or a crisis helpline. There's even a crisis text line – 741741 – that you or your friend can text.

6. Offer hope

Say to your friend, “I know giving up might seem like the only option right now, but these feelings will go away with the right help.”

7. Don't give advice

Your friend needs an ear to listen or a shoulder to cry on more than anything. It's not about the situation; it's about how badly your friend is hurting.

8. Make them feel seen

Tell your friend, “I've noticed some differences in you and want to know how you're doing.” Or, “You haven't seemed like yourself lately – are you doing alright?”

9. Don't argue

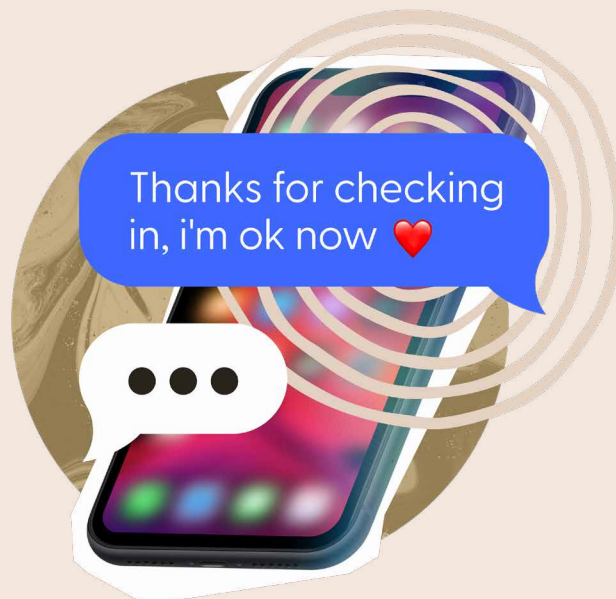
Never argue, judge, or say suicide is wrong. Don't tell them to look on the bright side. Listen and sympathize with their pain.

10. Make future plans with them

Make a plan to check in with them or hang out with them at a later date. Tell them you're looking forward to seeing them again.

11. Drop them a note

If you know someone who might be depressed, you could drop a nice note in their locker or backpack that says something like, “I'm happy you're my friend.”



Recognizing the Warning Signs

According to the Jason Foundation, four out of five teens who attempt suicide give clear warning signs.

Warning signs include:

- Talking about suicide
- Feeling hopeless, helpless, or worthless
- A deepening depression
- Preoccupation with death
- Taking unnecessary risks or exhibiting self-destructive behavior
- Acting out of character
- A loss of interest in the things one cares about
- Visiting or calling people one cares about
- Giving prized possessions away

Anyone can experience suicidal thoughts, but these risk factors increase the chances:

- Perfectionist personalities
- LGBTQ+ identities
- Learning disabilities
- Social isolation
- Low self-esteem
- Depression
- Histories of abuse, molestation, or neglect
- Genetic predisposition
- Family situations that include violence, substance abuse, or divorce



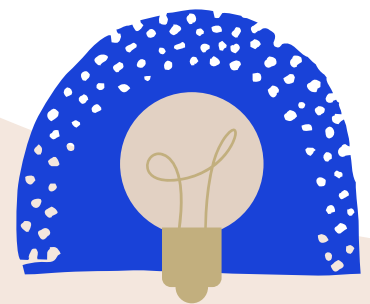
What to Do If Your Child Might Be Suicidal

If you believe your child or another person may be in immediate danger, call 911.

- **Recognize the warning signs.** No one knows your child better than you do, so make sure you're paying attention to changes in behavior.
- **Offer support.** Let your child know you're there for them – fully and unconditionally. Kids are often confused or uncertain about what they're going through, so it's important to validate their feelings.
- **Remove dangerous objects.** Ensure that weapons and medications aren't easily accessible. Consider putting these items behind a lock or completely removing them from your home.
- **Get help for your child.** If your child has expressed suicidal thoughts, talk with your child's school counselor, their physician, or a mental health professional to help your family understand what underlies those thoughts and to develop a treatment plan.

Get Support Now

- The Trevor Project's 24/7 Lifeline: **1-866-488-7386**
- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: **1-800-273-8255**
- Crisis 24/7 Text Line: **741741**



Online Resources



1. American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP)

Website: <https://afsp.org/find-support/resources/>

The AFSP website has a long list of resources including crisis hotlines, advice for finding mental health care, substance misuse treatment, and resources for issues such as self-harm, borderline personality disorder, schizophrenia, and other issues that often overlap with suicide. In September 2020, Bark will be donating \$10 for everyone who purchases a subscription through our referral program.

2. National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH)

Website: <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/suicide-prevention/index.shtml>

This website has information about mental illness and suicide prevention, including statistics, symptoms, treatment options, and risk factors. It also provides resources that can help people understand the connection between suicide and other mental health issues such as depression, bipolar disorder, and more.

3. Society for the Prevention of Teen Suicide (SPTS)

Website: <http://www.sptsusa.org/>

Teen suicide is a growing problem in America and many other countries. SPTS is a nonprofit organization created by parents whose teen children died by suicide. It's dedicated to helping to reduce the problem of teen suicide by providing resources for teens, parents, and educators. SPTS also pushes for legislation requiring teachers to undergo training in suicide prevention.

4. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

Website: <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/suicide/resources.html>

The CDC views overall mental health and suicide as important public health issues, and as such, it's dedicated extensive time and research to them. On this site, you'll find nationwide statistics, helpful resources, factsheets, and more.

5. Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention

Website: <http://actionallianceforsuicideprevention.org/resources>

This is a public and private alliance of organizations dedicated to preventing suicide. The Action Alliance works with many groups, including government agencies, religious groups, schools, and mental health organizations to help people understand and prevent suicide.

6. Suicide Prevention Resource Center (SPRC)

Website: <http://www.sprc.org/>

Crisis Line: 1-800-273-TALK (8255)

Chat: <http://chat.suicidepreventionlifeline.org/GetHelp/LifelineChat.aspx>

SPRC is one of the most comprehensive resources for suicide prevention. In addition to information and training, they offer a hotline to help anyone who's experiencing suicidal ideation: 1-800-273-TALK. Their website has links to resources in different states and a video providing advice on how to help support those considering suicide.

7. Crisis Text Line

Website: <https://www.crisistextline.org/>

Crisis Text Line: Text HOME to 741-741

Teens are often more comfortable texting than talking on the telephone, which is why Crisis Text Line provides an alternative option for those less comfortable with – or unable to – voice call. Specially trained crisis counselors will help de-escalate individuals who are considering suicide or dealing with severe mental health issues.

8. #Bethelto

Website: <https://www.bethelto.com/>

#BeTheITo is the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline's message for National Suicide Prevention Month and beyond, and its aim is to spread the word about actions people can take to prevent suicide. This site provides information on the 5 steps to help prevent suicide, ways to participate, and current resources.

9. Suicide Awareness Voices of Education (SAVE)

Website: <https://save.org/>

Founded by a mother who lost her daughter to suicide in 1979, SAVE's mission is to help prevent suicide through public awareness and education, reduce the stigma of suicidal ideation, and serve as a resource to those touched by suicide. The website provides resources, training kits, ways to get involved and donate, and more.

10. The Trevor Project

Website: www.thetrevorproject.org/

Founded in 1998 by the creators of the Academy Award-winning short film TREVOR, The Trevor Project is the leading national organization providing crisis intervention and suicide prevention services to LGBTQ+ young people under 25.

Need more help?

If you're worried about your child, [Bark](#) can help your family by monitoring for signs of suicidal ideation (and many more issues) in your child's texts, email, and 30+ social media apps and platforms. We even offer a free, one-week trial so you can make sure our service is right for your family.